

February 2024

**Written Testimony in Support of HB0739/SB1137,
Department of Health - Weight Loss Supplements Identification**

To the Honorable Members of the Maryland Legislature
And Health and Government Operations Committee,

My name is Stanley and I am a sophomore in college. I am writing to you on behalf of the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders **in favor of [HB0739/SB1137](#)**, an Act requiring the Maryland Department of Health to maintain a public record of over-the-counter (OTC) weight-loss supplements.

The dietary supplements industry generates billions of dollars in revenue from consumers annually and are not required to undergo pre-screens and rigorous testing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).¹ The industry deceptively markets these products to youth as promoting safe and effective weight-loss. As a youth who has lived experiences, I, and many of my peers, have been the victims of persuasive, unrealistic and misleading advertisements soliciting OTC dietary supplements. When I was 14, I began using a variety of weight-loss supplements that were easily accessible in grocery or supplement stores— none of which required parental permission or had any age-related restrictions. These supplements did not work as promised; rather, they fueled my psychological distress into taking further extreme measures to lose weight and starve myself of essential nutrients at a young age. Our stories and experiences are not statistical outliers and youth are increasingly using these products and remain unaware of the harms these products pose.

This Act (HB0739/SB1137) would publicize the vast assortment of toxic and under-regulated products and serve as an important, incremental step towards protecting youth from these products. Additionally, the Act may signal to youth, parents, and public health organizations that these products should neither be the *de facto* option to promote healthy weight-loss nor be touted as ‘safe’.

I listed key research from growing scientific literature on the harmful effects of dietary supplements use:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics issued a warning, strongly cautioning youth against using these OTC dietary supplements.²⁻³
- Every year, 23,000 Americans end up in emergency rooms because of dietary supplements, with a quarter of these linked to weight-loss supplements.⁴
- Weight-loss supplements have been documented to be laced with pesticides, heavy metals, and anabolic steroids that can cause stroke, cancer, and severe liver injury.⁵⁻⁸
- Adolescent and young adult women who use OTC pills face 6 times the risk of being diagnosed with an eating disorder within the next three years compared to non-users.⁹

I urge that the Honorable Members of the Maryland Legislature and the Health and Government Operations Committee support HB0739/SB1137, an Act that requires the Department of Health to publicly disclose and record the assortment of OTC dietary supplements. Please take this important step to increase consumer awareness, especially for youth and parents.

Sincerely,

Stanley Huang, age 19

Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders Youth Corps (STRIPED)

Footnotes:

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2. Golden NH, Schneider M, Wood C. Preventing Obesity and Eating Disorders in Adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2016;138(3).
3. LaBotz M, Griesemer BA, AAP Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness. Use of Performance-Enhancing Substances. *Pediatrics*. 2016;138(1).
4. Geller AI, Shehab N, Weidle NJ, Lovegrove MC, Wolpert BJ, Timbo BB, Mozersky RP, Budnitz, DS. Emergency department visits for adverse events related to dietary supplements. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2015;373(16):1531-40.
5. Abdel-Rahman A, Anyangwe N, Carlacci L, et al. The Safety and Regulation of Natural Products Used as Foods and Food Ingredients. *Toxicological Sciences*. 2011;123(2):333-348.
6. Fong TL, Klontz KC, Canas-Coto A, et al. Hepatotoxicity Due to Hydroxycut: A Case Series. *American Journal of Gastroenterology*. 2009;105(7):1561-1566.
7. Grundlingh J, Dargan PI, El-Zanfaly M, Wood DM. 2,4-Dinitrophenol (DNP): A Weight Loss Agent with Significant Acute Toxicity and Risk of Death. *Journal of Medical Toxicology*. 2011;7(3):205-212.
8. Guyda HJ. Use of Dietary Supplements and Hormones in Adolescents: A Cautionary Tale. *Pediatric Child Health*. 2005;10(10):587-590.
9. Levinson JA, Sarda V, Sonnevile K, Calzo JP, Ambwani S, Austin SB. Diet pill and laxative use for weight control and subsequent incident eating disorder in U.S. young women (2001-2016). *American Journal of Public Health*. 2020;110(1):109-111.